

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: March 14, 2010

Effective Body-Life Requires A Personal Growth Paradigm Shift

by Dan Trygg

“...and [the risen Jesus] gave, on the one hand, the apostles, also the prophets, also the evangelists, and also the shepherds-and-teachers ¹²towards the fitting-out of the saints unto a work of service, to the building up of the Body of Christ; ¹³until *we all* attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature person, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, ...¹⁴in order that we might no longer be infants, being wavelled and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery (lit., ‘dice-playing’, or the sleight-of-hand or misdirection used to cheat) of people, in craftiness with a scheme to lead [us] astray,... ¹⁵but truthing in love we might grow all things into Him, who is the Head/Source, Christ, ¹⁶out from whom *the whole Body*, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of *each individual part*, causes the growth of *the Body* toward a building up of itself in love.”

Eph. 4:11-16

A paradigm is the way in which we understand and interpret the world around us. It is our *perception* of what life is all about, how things work, what is important, what is “normal”, etc. The entry point to coming into the Kingdom of God begins with the command to “Repent” (Matt. 4:17; Acts 2:38). **Repentance**, in the Biblical meaning of that term, means to “change your perception”. This is the equivalent of a **paradigm shift**, ...learning to see things differently, i.e., to understand the world from *God’s* perspective, ...to give importance to what *He* says is important, and to come into agreement with *His* purposes for our lives.

When we first become Christians, we catch glimpses of reality from God’s perspective, but, by and large, the majority of our perceptions are still based upon how we originally learned to look at things as non-Christians. As we put more Biblical truth into our minds, we begin to broaden our awareness of Reality, and our faculties of perception become *renewed* (Romans 12:2). **The fact that repentance and renewal are commanded by God indicates that (1.) they do not necessarily happen automatically; and (2.) the exercise of our capacity to choose can radically affect the outcome of how well we succeed in lining up our perspective with God’s.** This, in turn, deeply determines our understanding of *who we are in Christ*, and *what God expects of us*. As Prov. 29:18 indicates, if we do not have a *vision* for what we are to be doing, ...or what the possibilities might be..., we tend to *not* be self-disciplined. This only makes sense. Why would we restrain or exert ourselves if we saw no purpose in it? We are goal-oriented beings, and we need something clear to strive for.

What is the purpose for our growth, according to the Bible? In our culture, efforts at growing are primarily for self-aggrandizement. We go to school because we will need an education to get a good job. Occasionally, we will pursue education in an area we find pleasure in, ...or simply because we are curious, and enjoy learning. Generally, our educational pursuits are either dictated to us by parents, job requirements, or we choose them because of self-interest. In this paradigm, if we are no longer interested, or required, to grow, we often stop putting forth the effort to develop ourselves in any structured manner. There are more than enough distractions and kinds of entertainment to occupy our time and attention. If we have no larger purpose in life, we tend to live only for our immediate pleasure.

At the very heart of Jesus’ admonition to “Repent!” is the phrase, “...for the Kingdom of God is at hand”. *The whole point of our redemption is that we can be freed up from the deceptive, self-destructive, enslaving influences of sin in order to take our rightful role in God’s Kingdom as one of His servants and children.*

The paradigm shift of the Kingdom of God moves us from self-centeredness to God-centeredness,
from self-gratification to desiring to please and bless our Heavenly Father,
from a “my will” to a “Your will” mentality.

In the selfish life we attempt to please *ourselves*, and serve *our* animal appetites and self-importance. In the God-devoted life we seek to love, honor and serve *Him*. He promises that as we “seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness”, all the other things we need will be added to us (Matt. 6:33). The promise is that our life will be fulfilling, a blessing to ourselves and others, *if* we walk with God, ...but *not necessarily as we might expect*, and certainly *not on our terms* (Jn. 10:10; 12:24-26). **The self-fulfillment we experience is the by-product of a relationship to Him that includes obedience.** If we *say* we know God, and are in fellowship with Him, but *continue to walk in the darkness* of sin and selfishness, we are *greatly deceived* (I Jn. 1:6). **The threshold to the doorway into the Kingdom of God is the denial of self, and a commitment to serve Jesus, no matter what kind of “flack” or inconveniences may follow** (Matt. 16:24,25). Once that is settled, then God can train us to do what He has created us to do.

This brings us back to the dynamics of the early church of Acts 2-4. They had crossed that threshold of self-denial, and were diligently applying themselves to growth. They were investing themselves in coming to

understand the apostolic teaching, and they were actively engaged in the interactive Body-life of small-group, intimate, open-hearted sharing. They sought God, and worshiped Him in prayer and praising, and they responded with open-hearted obedience to address the needs which came to their attention through the table-fellowship and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. **These new believers stand out for their commitment to grow, and their commitment to give of themselves for others.** The teaching of those days has been so watered down and complicated over the centuries that we have lost sight of its radical simplicity: “Jesus is *the King*. Do what *He* says.”

This is the same message that Jesus Himself had given the apostles only a few weeks before: “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me (i.e., ‘I am the King’). Going about, therefore, disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to do all that I said (‘Do what I say’)” (Matt. 28:18-20). What is one thing He said right in this passage that calls out to us for obedience? **At the very heart of these instructions is the call for us to make disciples** (active, obedient followers) of others. So, if we are to be active, obedient followers of Jesus, and we are going to do “all that He said”, then we need to recognize that *we* are responsible to disciple others. This means teaching, training, and encouraging *them* to pursue Jesus with a Kingdom mentality (obedience). **How far are we responsible to take them? “Teaching them to do all that I said.”** The job will not be done until every last one of us is totally obedient to everything Jesus has said in the Scriptures, which includes becoming familiar with the Holy Spirit’s leading, who has come to take Jesus’ place as our Helper, Guide and Director (Jn. 14:16,17,25,26; 16:12-15; cf. Rom. 8:14). Isn’t it interesting that this is exactly what the apostle Paul says is the job of the church. We are to grow, and help one another grow, “until *we all* attain to the unity of the faith, and of the experiential-knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature person, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). When I say that it is “the job of the church”, I mean that it is *your* job and *my* job. **If Jesus is the King, and we are to obey Him, and He says, “Help one another grow”, then it becomes our responsibility to do that, and to do it well.**

The shift in the personal growth paradigm is this: Growing to maturity is part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian. We must take responsibility for our growth and development, and we need to be encouraging our brothers and sisters to grow and mature, as well. This covers many areas: Our experience of God; learning to walk in the Spirit; growing up into healthy, sound individuals, with good mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health; understanding truth; developing an ever greater capacity for obedience; becoming good and skilled stewards of the time, energy, gifts and resources which God entrusts to us; developing skills to guide and develop others, etc. **The paradigm shift is that we are servants and stewards of the King. We have a duty to become all that we can for His Kingdom.** Furthermore, *there will be an accounting* for what we have done with what He has provided for us. At that moment, it will become very clear that He expects *you* to be responsible for *your* life. There will be no excuses that “So-and-so didn't do *their* job, so I couldn't accomplish what *I* was supposed to.” That might be true in a short-term scenario, but it will not excuse you for not taking initiative to *find a way to accomplish the King's directive*. Maybe you are giving “So-and-so” too much power in your life, or possibly you need to push “So-and-so” to new levels of growth. In any case, **the King will be holding you accountable for you, ...the development of your character, your skills, your obedience, your effectiveness at accomplishing His will.** When you stand before Him, excuses like what television show was on, or that you just didn’t feel like it, will suddenly appear to you to be as lame *as they really are*. Talking about accountability before God is not meant to be a scary, heavy thing. It is meant only to push aside the clouds of distraction and self-rationalization so we can see what is real. *By God's grace*, we will be motivated to work hard at being good stewards of what God gives us, and we will receive a “Well done” on that day. There is blessing that comes to those who do the Father’s will. As we diligently give ourselves to growth and service, we will find ourselves full of joy and praise at God’s activity in our lives, as were the early believers (Acts 2:43,46).

Some have been asking me, “Where are we going as a Body?” There is a lot that I don’t know. The Bible says that “we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, so that we would walk in them.” **God knows where we are going. We are being prepared for good works. He will bring them into our experience at the right time.** Some of that is happening now. We need to take seriously that *we are being shaped and prepared*. We need to *apply ourselves diligently toward personal growth*, and the growth of our interactive Body-life. **We should expect that God will give us growth in numbers and influence that reaches evermore beyond the spheres of our current experience.** We can reasonably expect that, as was true with the early church, some of us will be called to other fields of labor. I see that **there are a number of people who are getting a vision for doing ministry**, which is an encouraging sign of health. **We ought to do what we can to help these people clarify and grow into the vision God is calling them toward.**